

City of New Castle Delaware
Special Council Meeting: Organizational Work Session
Town Hall – 201 Delaware Street – New Castle
Thursday, April 23, 2015 - 10:00 a.m.

Purpose: Adoption of Rules for Government of Council and Transaction of Business

Call to order: 10:00 a.m.

Roll Call:

Councilperson Megginson
Councilperson Vannucci
Council President Ratchford
Councilperson Petty
Councilperson Di Mondì

Also present:

William Barthel, City Administrator
Donald Reese, Mayor
Janet Carlin, City Treasurer

Council President Linda Ratchford welcomed everyone saying she was looking forward to working together. President Ratchford stated that now that the election was over it's time to go forward with City business. She said that the meeting would be a discussion on structuring the organization.

President Ratchford stated that typically the Council has used Roberts Rules of order to run their Council meetings; she asked if Council was still comfortable with continuing to use parliamentary procedure, unless it conflicts with something in the City Code. There was no objection from Council; President Ratchford stated that they would continue in that mode.

The next agenda item discussed was a discussion on liaison roles and assignments. President Ratchford stated that is was her understanding that in the past, when there was not a City Administrator, City Council members took a more active role in work duties, because there was no one to manage certain departments.

Once a City Administrator was hired, the Council depended on that person to take over these duties. She specified that New Castle is a Mayor, Council and Manager form of government, in that you have a strong Council and the City Administrator reports to Council. The City Administrator supervises the employees and runs the day to day operations of the City. Council's role is to set policy, pass laws and to be responsive to the needs of the residents of the City.

President Ratchford stated that historically the liaisons roles have been based on the number of votes a candidate received, interest, and Council President input. President Ratchford said that Council can be helpful on projects, but it is not the job of Council to supervise employees. She

said that there are areas where Council liaisons are no longer necessary, such as Human Resources, and Buildings. Council needs to be concerned from a legal standpoint about getting involved in Human Resources. In the area of Buildings, that would be considered maintenance. Council will get involved when there is a special project, such as the Banks Building.

President Ratchford stated Council has also been connected with certain Committees and Commissions. She feels that Council does not need liaisons to coordinate with the Planning Commission or the Historic Area Commission, that would be the responsibility of the City Administrator; additionally citing that these Commissions make recommendations to Council, which could raise a legal issue. President Ratchford recommended making assignments for policy areas that a Councilperson would work on. Smaller groups could work on areas of policy.

President Ratchford recommended that Mr. Di Mondì take the liaison position for finance, because of his background and expertise. We also have our City Treasurer, Janet Carlin who has a role in overseeing the City Budget. President Ratchford noted that she would like to see written references of what duties are performed by each elected position.

President Ratchford recommended Mr. Megginson continue as the liaison for Public Services, he has experience and an interest in that area. President Ratchford recommended a change in the liaison assignments of Mrs. Petty and Mr. Vannucci. She suggested assigning Mrs. Petty the combination of Parks and Recreation, with Recreation having a broader scope to include special projects such as the Banks Building, as it is part of the Recreation determination at the Wharf.

President Ratchford recommended Mr. Vannucci to be the liaison for Public Safety, which would include his existing responsibility of liaison with Good Will Fire Company, stating that she felt the Fire Department did need a Council liaison because they are strongly linked to our Police Department.

President Ratchford asked for questions or comments. Councilperson Petty said that she objected, stating that she felt there is no Parks and Recreation, that Council had dissolved it. She also said that as she was not a new Councilperson, she felt her liaison responsibilities had been established, and should remain intact.

President Ratchford noted that this was the first year where the City had a staggered election, and as such Council was not all coming on at the same time. Every election year would be considered a new Council, even though two of the councilpersons would already be in office.

President Ratchford said the Parks and Recreation is taking on a broader interpretation. There are the existing parks, as well as a proposed new park in Washington Park, someone on Council needs to work on that park with the Trustees, and the Banks Building will need to be looked at in conjunction with the new pier. President Ratchford noted that Councilperson Petty has been a proponent of the Healthy Communities designation and Community Wellness as well as the No Smoking campaign, this all fits in with the Parks and Recreation liaison.

Councilperson Di Mondì, commented that he had indicated to President Ratchford that he did not want to break Council tradition and he would accept any role that was offered to him. Stating

the tradition has been that the liaison roles had been appointed based on the number of votes. This will need to be addressed at some point, with some elections have one or two people running for a seat and others having 6 or 7 people running for the seats.

President Ratchford thanked Mr. Di Mondì and stated that she based all her recommendations on each Councilperson's backgrounds, expertise and interests. At this point each election will be viewed as a new Council, even though there will be sitting Council with continuing terms.

Communications - President Ratchford opened a discussion on how Council communicates with each other and how they can improve communications. She said that Mrs. Petty had stated that all Council members should have all the same information available to them. President Ratchford said that emails have been set up for all Council members, and it is important to use your City email address for City business.

Council cannot meet together as a group unless it is an open meeting, so she proposed having more frequent work sessions when there could be discussion about topics; she also suggested having a weekly report from the City Administrator. That would keep Council up to date on key issues.

Nominations for Commissions: President Ratchford reviewed the process for nominations for the City Boards, Committees and Commissions. She stated that they all have different processes. The Planning Commission members are all appointed by the Mayor, and then Council approves those appointments. Other boards and Commissions are usually a combination of Mayor and Council appointments. As such, nominations need to come from Council as a body. We need to look for ways to share the appointee's backgrounds. In addition to expressed interest there needs to be willingness to serve, experience, and ability to serve in an unbiased manner. President Ratchford asked Council for ideas on how we can go forward with the nominations procedure.

Councilperson Vannucci said that qualifications are important, especially for the Tree Commission. Councilperson Di Mondì agreed that if a person is appointed to a Committee there should be some degree of expertise. Mr. Di Mondì also asked why the Trustees have an appointment to some of our Commissions.

President Ratchford said that she would look at that and see if there is something in the Code regarding Trustees sitting on specific boards.

Mr. Megginson agreed that Commission and Committee members should have a certain level of expertise, and added that as a member of different Committees it is very discouraging to have a meeting and not have a quorum show up. He suggested that there be rules established for attendance.

President Ratchford said that some committees are regulated by the State, but we need to set rules, and make sure people understand the responsibility of taking on a seat on a City Board or Committee.

Treasurer Janet Carlin asked if it would be a conflict of interest for a member of a Board to also work for the City, such as if a Tree Advisory Commission member also did tree work for the

City. President Ratchford stated that it would be a conflict for someone in the Tree Business, but not necessary in the landscaping business, or as long as if that persons company did not profit from that persons membership to a certain board.

Discussion ensued of implementing a form/application for anyone interested in serving on a Committee. If a person expresses an interest they would fill out the application, and these forms would be available to Council before appointing a person to a Committee.

Agendas and Meeting Information: President Ratchford stated that Council Packets are available prior to the meetings; and Agendas are posted seven days prior to the meetings. We strive to have Council Agendas completed in time for the New Castle Weekly's noon deadline.

Councilperson Di Mondì asked if we could put more description in the paper for each agenda item. He said that in the past there would be a synopsis of the items being considered by Council in the Weekly. This would allow people to have more information about what is being discussed at meetings, and might encourage people to attend.

President Ratchford said that we could have more description in the agendas presented at the meetings. She also wanted to streamline our present Council Agenda. She suggested making a portion of the agenda a "Consent Agenda," routine items such as minutes, and staff reports could be passed with one vote. Any single item could be removed from the consent agenda if anyone on Council thought it needed further discussion.

Councilperson Di Mondì asked if the request to remove something from the consent agenda would have to be made before the meeting, or could it be made during the meeting. President Ratchford said that could be done in the meeting. President Ratchford said another option other Councils use is to incorporate short Public Hearings into the regular Council meeting. This would save time for items that Council felt they could reasonably accomplish within a regular meeting.

City Administrator William Barthel said that would mean the Regular Council Agenda might read, Item one, Public Hearing on Noise Ordinance. We would have to make sure that it was a legal proceeding in a Meeting, but President Ratchford said she has seen it done in other City meetings throughout the State.

Discussion on procedure of accepting the Treasurers Report. Mr. Barthel stated that Council is approving what is presented; Council is not auditing the numbers. City Treasurer, Janet Carlin said the monthly report is a snapshot of where the City stands, and what has transpired during the last month.

Councilperson Di Mondì suggested that there be some wording that it is not an audited report. The actual accounts fluctuate throughout the month.

President Ratchford also suggested that wording be added to the Agendas that people needing special accommodations should contact the office.

President Ratchford asked if Council had time preferences for work sessions, or special meetings. Councilperson Di Mondì said that during tax season he would be unavailable during the day.

Councilperson Megginson said that we can schedule the meetings on a case by case basis.

Council Di Mondì, asked if the City Administrator could give us a report on the budget for the last 10 years to look at before going through the budget process. This background could help when looking at the departments.

Mr. Barthel said he could get a report for the various that were approved.

President Ratchford asked for any comments or suggestions on the upcoming budget process. She said that last year the process was streamlined. There were fewer meetings than in previous years. She suggested that we might want something in between those two points. We need to look at the Departments, that is the base of the budget. But there are also decisions within the department Budgets, for example a new truck that Council should be involved in that process. And after the departments are funded then Council can look at special projects such as street repairs.

Mr. Barthel stated that he and the City Treasurer have been working with the different departments to project the operating budgets. At that point Council can determine what extra finds are available and what they can be used for. Mr. Barthel noted that the City also gets requests from various groups in the City. President Ratchford asked what the time from was on getting the operations budget set.

Mr. Barthel said that the City was entering negotiations with the AFSCME Union to set the contract for the employees. He felt that he could have a skeleton budget put together by the middle of May. There will probably be numbers that are not available, such as the AFSCME contract numbers, there is also an insurance bidding process that needs to be finalized, and the Tax Amnesty amounts.

President Ratchford asked that they set up a draft budget with estimates from past history for the AFSCME and Insurance costs. Including the requests from the various groups, and any highlights and anything out of the ordinary for the various departments.

Councilperson Di Mondì suggested including in relation to the AFSCME contract, the national inflation rate for the last 10 years and the percentage of pay increases received by the employees. This could be used as an equation in bargaining.

President Ratchford said that in addition to looking at the inflation rate she had requested some local benchmarking of what other similarly sized municipalities are paying for the same positions.

President Ratchford thanked the City Treasurer and City Administrator and other City staff for the work they have done on the Budget thus far, and said the first Budget workshop meeting would be upcoming.

Training and Orientation President Ratchford stated that she has asked the City Administrator to set up training for Council and for all the Committees and Commissions on issues such as FOIA, what is the responsibility of sitting on a Committee.

City Administrator Report - Mr. Barthel said that the City is working on the Budget, and that there will be a pre-bid meeting for the 14th Street, Mt. Vesuvius, Platt Alley and Rt. 9 parking project that went out on bid. He expects to have bids back in two weeks and at that time those amounts can be added to the budget.

Dave Athey has been asked to work on a bid packet for the downtown curbing project. That should be completed within the next few weeks. These are street projects that include curbing and ADA compliant curbs in the Delaware Street area.

Councilperson Di Mondì if the City was paying for that or the property owners. Mr. Barthel said it was the Handicapped curbs and the crosswalks, not the sidewalks. Mr. Di Mondì said he thought the property owner paid for the curbing as well as the sidewalks.

President Ratchford stated that there are several issues regarding the Delaware Street area. We need to get the City streets in compliance with the ADA standards. We have done a survey of the whole City and we need to establish a plan and every year work toward improving overall accessibility. We have been looking at the downtown area, and it does need some improvement.

Councilperson Di Mondì stated that there are areas all over the City that need curb improvements, and wanted to know if Council was going to set a precedent of doing certain parts of the City for nothing, and not other parts.

President Ratchford stated that for the Delaware Street project they are looking at several issues, ADA compliance, drainage issues, and the paving, which would come later. The downtown business district needs to be looked at holistically.

Councilperson Megginson said that in other areas of the City such as Washington Park, it is guttering, not curbing, and when the streets are resurfaced the streets the gutters are replaced. Gutters are part of the Street projects.

Mr. Barthel stated that part of the 14th Street, includes Mt. Vesuvius, Platt Alley, 14th Street and a turn lane on Rt. 9. President Ratchford added that Council will be looking at paving in the City and in addition to the 14th Street project. The City has also received bids on parking lot engineering studies.

Council has approved parking in various areas of the City. On 3rd Street, behind the Bank and possibly that funding has not been approved.

The Pier has been approved by the Army Corps of Engineers and DNREC, a bid package will be going out for the pier construction. The permits have been approved.

Mr. Barthel said there is a "Green Street" feasibility grant that the City is working on. It's a planning grant looking at water runoff on Delaware Street. It is a \$40,000.00 grant with a \$20,000.00 match. The City engineer is compiling information, once we get the approval it will go before Council to see if they want to match the grant funds.

Mr. Barthel said we are working with the Trustees, on the walking path in the park. We have been working with FEMA and DEMA regarding moving the Battery Park walkway. We have asked for an extension from DEMA. Once we get approval, it will be the Trustees who proceed with that project, the City is just facilitating the grant.

Mr. Barthel said the grant the City received from Senator Poore to study Battery Park drainage, we have submitted approximately \$12,000.000 in payments back to the State. That is a \$40,000.00 Grant that we received from Senator Poore, and the Trustees are paying the matching portion of the grant.

Mr. Barthel said we are also working with the Trustees on the Living Shoreline DNREC Coastal Management Assistance grant. We have been approved for this grant, and we are working with the State to iron out the details.

President Ratchford stated the City is also working on a Neighborhood Block Grant/Downtown Development Designation that we have applied for; it would be for master plan development, it has no matching funds required.

Councilperson Vannucci asked if they were going to have rides on the Friday night before Separation Day. The Mayor said the Separation Day Committee was looking at scaled back ride for Friday night.

On a motion from Councilperson Megginson, second from Councilperson Vannucci, the meeting was adjourned to executive session at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kim Burgmuller